

## POLITICAL IMAGE, THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY

### AFTER THE END OF A HISTORY

VIORELLA MANOLACHE\*

**Abstract.** The proposal of balancing bringing together Francis Fukuyama and Jean-François Revel follows, in the architecture of the present text, a triple-registry directory: the *first level* concerns the recognition of their status [here] as thinkers and analysts-evaluators of a reality with finished surfaces or highlights, as promoters of a *paradigmatic approach or a before and after* consolidated perspective/analysis, summing up the characteristics of a *thesis*; the *second level* of interest underlines confluences, intersections, dialogue involvement and the interpenetration of ideas, perceived in/through a contextual exchange of words, a dynamic of ideas that include the two commentators; the *third aspect* inventories explicit references to Romania, as way of validating a particular *history* individualized in *the sequence of events of world history*.

**Keywords:** *The End of History, the Reviriment of Democracy, Fukuyama & Revel, after the end of a history.*

#### *Two theses: one thing in common & accents [of slightly different] hue*

Bringing together and balancingly presenting Francis Fukuyama and Jean-François Revel follows, in the economy of the present text, a triple directorial register. The first one is aimed at the recognition of their statute [here] as thinkers and-researchers-evaluators of a reality with finite surfaces or highlights, as promoters of a *paradigmatic approach* or a *before and after* consolidated perspective/analysis, summing up the characteristics of a *thesis (misleading*<sup>1</sup> – in the case of Fukuyama – by its very distribution as a theory of the active core of the word/concept of History; or *revised*<sup>2</sup> – in the case of Revel – through the dissolution of communism, which was the subject matter of his research). The

---

\* Scientific Researcher III, PhD, Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu”, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania; vio\_s13@yahoo.com.

<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Sfârșitul istoriei și ultimul om* [*The end of History and the last Man*], translated by Mihaela Eftimiu, Bucharest, Paideia, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Revel, *Revirimentul democrației* [*The Reviriment of democracy*], translated by Dan C. Mihăilescu, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1995, p. 20.

second *level* of interest underlines confluences and intersections of ideas, engages dialogue and maintains it by contextual exchanges, as an appropriately substantial debate of ideas. The third level assesses explicit references to Romania as formulations for validating a private *history*, individualized by certain *sequences of events*.

We believe it appropriate to attempt to analyse the filtrating mechanism of irrigating substance which decides the option for a title with two (*italics-marked*) shades: *after* (the end), and *of a* (history).

The thesis about the *end of history* refers to the theory of Francis Fukuyama, enhancing [here] two specifications of content and form. The first proposes a *formal* recourse to the first article enouncing the topic – *The End of History?* (*National Interest*, 16, summer 1989, pp. 3 to 18) by means of which the argument is built/released by Fukuyama under the sign of a self-questioning architecture subsequently reloaded, as a statement, in *The End of History and the Last Man* (The Free Press, New York, 1992). The article *asks* and the volume *states*, operating with two pivotal terms/syntagma: Fukuyama acknowledges and accepts, by *history*, the significances of conventional design; and through the term *end* he refers to a condition far removed from currently unfolding events, anchored to the perspective of a conclusion of *History* (written with a capital H) by a singular, coherently-evolving process; a formulation imprinted both by terminological, intellectual-Hegelian inflexions and by Marxist “understatements”. Both philosophers – Hegel and Marx – are accepted by Fukuyama in order to mediate the projection of the end of history in/ through the liberal state (Hegel) and through communist society (Marx). But, more than that, present interpretations are mediating springs for validating the *novelty* of Fukuyama’s thesis, and for the explanatory answer given – in 1992 – to questions formulated in the 1989 article: *yes* (we note), “it also makes sense to talk about a coherent and directional History of humanity that will ultimately lead most of humanity towards liberal democracy (...)”, by resorting to the two objectives of reality; to enhance economic aspects and to validate the “fight for recognition”<sup>3</sup>. The thesis relies on following the path taken by “asserted consensus” regarding the legitimacy of liberal democracy, considered a “winning formula” (related to hereditary monarchy, fascism or communism), but also a *terminus point* of ideological evolution, an *ultimate* form of human governance in the context of the *end of history*, a conjuncture that deepens a state marked by/through the absence of any fundamental internal contradiction, lacking defects, and thus reaching the stage of perfection, representative of a system without nuances that needs to be perfected<sup>4</sup>.

The approach of Jean-François Revel is disinterested in questioning the signs of *the end*, which he identifies pivotally in the flow of an evaluation mechanism for the manner/way in which democracies *end*. It is no accident that *The reviriment of democracy* re-validates the thesis of *How democracies perish* by appealing to the symptoms of a “mystic Gorby-mania”, or to self-suggestions perpetuated by

<sup>3</sup> Fukuyama, *quoted work*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

democratic countries in their frontal meeting with the crises of the communist era. Revel's thesis is a projective one – "I have not argued in any way that democracies will necessarily disappear (...) I have simply shown how this can be achieved"<sup>5</sup> – anchored to the area of *after*, as an unfinished/ending state. Compared to the filtering angle that Fukuyama agrees with, Revel's acceptance enhances particular accents/nuances of *history* – "history not only re-warms chilled food", but "re-warms and re-freezes its own preparations", taking advantage of delays/syncopal spaces built between/inside the triumph of the principles of liberalism and any necessary action for implementing its desiderates. The accents pointed out by Revel confirm, in fact, Fukuyama's perspective: "such a scheme would be operative *if* (we note) we witnessed a *linear progression* (we note – see Fukuyama – history ending as a singular, coherent-evolutionary process), in which the various pre-modern societies would gradually move towards democratic liberalism"<sup>6</sup>.

In Revel's opinion, *the end* is surpassed by the perspective of *after*, a continuity marked not so much by the signs of an obvious *terminus*, as by the effect of (*historical*) *weakening/weakness*. In fact, this thesis acknowledges the desire for a priori prevision, using a set of rationales that can be identified within/by evidence, and according to which: history is the sum of individual actions; success/failure, total/partial fulfilment, different/desired results are all related to issued goals, without being confined to a formula of absolute predictability; falsehood and the fabrication of foresight consist in the impossibility of assessing decision and the choice to decide, to act or to refrain; the eventual-cyclical forecast rules out any prognosis based on the analysis of structures<sup>7</sup>. "A suicidal system", surviving from/through "fantasies of historical materialism", utopian to the impossibility of recognizing the existence of real facts, a product of erroneous thinking and "an invention unable to produce any historical determinism", illusory and grounded in terror, communism is not the result of history but is assimilated to a hiatus, a syncope in its evolution, an eruption caused by a "systematic delirium" and a serious accident; in fact, a symptom of an augmented "missed historical experience"<sup>8</sup>.

In Revel's acceptance, the preposition *after* suggests the decision to *re-turn*; a plausible argument if placed between 1988-1992, a temporal sequence which, by detachment from its revolutionary attribute (eluded by the creation, the discovery and the novelty implied by any *sui generis* revolutionary act), determines the reactivation of the meanings of *before* – a return to the starting point, *before* communism – in order to thus extract the valences of *after* – by listing the characteristic elements of a democratic society: nationalism, family, religion, capitalism, private property, parliamentary democracy, citizen rights, pluralism, freedom of the press, etc.<sup>9</sup>.

*Only* in the limit situation of *after* can one see the significance of the *revirment of democracy*, by reconfiguring the language and essence of democracy; the

<sup>5</sup> Jean-François Revel, *quoted work*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 215-216.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196.

vocabulary, the word becomes the deciding factor that saves *the last man* offering him the chance to survive *the end*: “Everything will grow again, of course, one day or another, because man never gets tired of resuming everything (...) But everything will grow again on a land rebuilt in its entirety and from which even the last strand of sterile dust left by the totalitarian regime will be removed”<sup>10</sup>. If *History* is over, the meaning of its return/resumption gives birth to ... *histories* unburdened by *History*.

### *In a dialogue of ideas: Fukuyama & Revel*

“*In the eyes of someone like Jean-François Revel*”...  
*Fukuyama about Revel*

Francis Fukuyama opts for accepting a dialogue with Jean-François Revel as an open debate situation, either by placing Revel in the extension of his own text, or through an appeal including consecutive notes (from the end of the chapter) dedicated to him, meant not only to bring more clarity to the perspective, but also to maintain an ideal exchange of dose(ing). Balanced, Fukuyama’s appeal to Revel is impregnated, on the one hand, by recommending him as *good critic of the ante-perestroika and glasnost context* (note 13); and, on the other, by the ability to investigate the way in which “(Revel’s) more radical formulations about the power and weakness of democracy and totalitarianism” would be nothing more than a reactive, energizing and awareness-raising form of awakening “fellow Democrats” to the danger posed by Soviet power. “If he had really been convinced that democracies were as incapable as he described them, he would have had no point in writing *How Democracies Perish*,” Fukuyama insists (note 16)<sup>11</sup>.

Fukuyama revisits and re-analyses the moment of 1983, summarizing it in the context in which Revel announced that democracy could be nothing more than “a mere historical accident, a brief bracket which closes before our eyes.” If, textually, *to close* expresses [here] the significance of *to be exhausted*, without marchingly decreeing *the end*, Fukuyama turns Revel’s perspective towards the equation proposed by Jeanne Kirkpatrick, validating a dynamic *detente* of totalitarian states based on the perpetuation of *mistrust* in democracy. This sentiment erodes any inner conviction (even in consolidated democracies, as Revel points out) able to defend itself by deepening difficulties, inherent in the “limitation of their democratic nature”; claiming that there are “relatively minor causes of dissatisfaction (which) coordinate, disturb, unsettle and paralyze democracies”<sup>12</sup>.

“In Revel’s eyes,” Fukuyama believes, the acute weakness of democracy is the effect of its inability to defend itself against tyranny and, above all, to launch and propagate immunizing concerns *after* the removal of totalitarian forms. Fukuyama extends the context of the debate by referring the problems of democracy to the internally-eroded structure of “deep sources of dissatisfaction”, subsumed

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *quoted work*, p. 281.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

to validating the assertion of “whether life is truly satisfying”. It is precisely in this context of debate that Fukuyama places and bases his own theory. *Through the eyes of Fukuyama*, “if we see no such *contradictions*, then we can say, with Hegel and Kojeve, that we have reached the end of History. But, if we still see them, then we will have to say that History, in the strict sense of the word, will continue”<sup>13</sup>.

*“I totally agree with the substance of Fukuyama’s thesis” ...  
Revel - about what we owe to Fukuyama*

Jean-François Revel engages in a face-to-face dialogue with Francis Fukuyama, in the very corpus of his own text, in order to point out Fukuyama’s merits (“what we owe to Fukuyama”), as a way of “intelligent concretization of a dose of inherent optimism”, and a fair evaluation of the way in which his ideas corresponded (at the time of the article’s appearance, in 1989) to a certain *expectancy horizon*<sup>14</sup>.

“I totally agree with the background of Fukuyama’s thesis,” confesses Revel, bringing nuances to this ideatic form and outlook. Thus, the victory of liberalism represents, in Revel’s opinion, a moral-virtual success, at the expense of Fukuyama’s theory designated by the process of “fulfilling a concrete reality”. What Fukuyama minimizes, Revel notes, is precisely “the role slow movement and regression have in history”, empowering him to amend explanatory schemes overvaluing the role of economy at the expense of ideological, psychological and cultural premises. But he appreciates that Fukuyama *does not go all the way* but suspends the meaning of *after* without highlighting the role of decisions taken by certain actors in the fulfilment of history; a premise aptly stating that “the will of man is often opposed to the prevailing reality, considered as the supreme model”<sup>15</sup>.

*Fukuyama is right* – is the verdict issued by Revel regarding Fukuyama’s insistence on the status of “universally-accepted reference” and “unanimously adopted” purpose, attached to the liberal-democratic capitalist and cultural Western models, especially since his thesis intersects with perspectives also issued by Revel in *Needless Knowledge*. The difference/nuance offered by Revel’s thesis is that of marking *terminals* with the role of *sequentials*, of *stages*: “from here,” Revel states, arises the necessity of theoretical-practical interference, making “facts agree with the theoretical option”, and “the impossibility of adapting facts to the ideal, thus maintaining ideological confusion”<sup>16</sup>.

But, equally, not all approaches attest to Fukuyama’s arguments. *More than Fukuyama believed*, Revel insists, historical solutions are not the result of rational analysis, of evidence that supports the surface liberalization of communism – an effect generated not so much by an increase in the standard of living (accelerated by offered Western aid), as by the signs of *the end*, of systemic decomposition, impossible not only to prefigure, but also to rectify. “Analysing crises and

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-François Revel, *quoted work*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

realizing the absurdity of the system” – *Fukuyama believed* – were not the main factors which accelerated the pace of structural collapse; this was brought about by attached reforms, produced not by an imperative need to escape stagnant reality, but by “the resignation of Soviet leaders in the face of the need for reforms”<sup>17</sup>.

The ideational intersection of the two thinkers occurs in *the background* of the stated thesis – “liberalism has emerged as the best political and social system so far” – its *form* allowing Revel to offer useful information: “I do not believe in any automatism for the implantation of democracy, in any dialectical process working on behalf of and in the place of people”<sup>18</sup>. If Fukuyama investigates in order to prove, with arguments, *the end of history*, Revel accepts/affirms not only the openings of *after*, but also the imminence of a *back to/a formulaic return to*. The solution proposed by Revel is “the invention of a world politics of democratization”, permanently released from passivity, from distance, from expectations, from the primacy of “the time needed for it to work”. Defined in relation to the existence coordinates of *the last man – the one who has to work, and the only one who creates* – history can be nothing but “*a list of creations, never the engine thereof*”. The area of *after* thus bears the marks of creation of *the last man*, the one that ensures the operation of *the engine of histories*.

#### *The end of a history: the Romanian case*

“Time does not work more than space”, states Jean-François Revel<sup>19</sup>, in a foreshadowing manner.

The assertion with directing role is required, in duplicate, to refer to the meaning of the indecipherable article *a* with the meaning-of-determination-by-name: “a history” individualizes a common time and particularizingly determines its space. Temporally, Fukuyama insists on *an* event series: the domino effect – the collapse of the East-German state represents the trigger for the fall of communist regimes in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania; organizing “acceptable free elections” at the beginning of 1991 will be keeping the communists (reformers) in leadership positions in Romania, Serbia and Albania; it is a time of spatial liberation through the disappearance of the political base of the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe<sup>20</sup>.

Fukuyama’s reference to Romania inventories a set of democratic ideas that undermine communist regimes, but also highlights “the difficult establishment of democracy”, against a background of lack of balance and continuous political disorder, a sign of blocked transition towards a “partial democracy”; if “East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, followed by Poland – made rapid transitions to full democracy (...) those less developed, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Albania, chose reformist communists during the period 1990-1991”<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *quoted work*, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

Received through the prism of this sign of *the end of history*, the revolutionary phenomenon requires, according to Fukuyama, to be summarily subdued, with thymotic anger and a claim to recognition. In fact, Fukuyama assimilates the reality of the 1989 moment to revolutionary situations, equating the Romanian case with a chain of events propagated from Timisoara and generalized throughout the Romanian space, and outlines the profile of “the most humane and free people” – “revolutionaries who have fought Ceausescu’s Securitate in Romania; they were free, and therefore the most humane of people (...) They were former slaves who had proved themselves capable of risking their lives in a bloody struggle to free themselves. But when they finally succeed, as it is normal to happen, they will create a stable democratic society in which struggle and work in the old sense are no longer needed, and in which the possibility of being as free and as human as in their revolutionary struggles has been abolished”<sup>22</sup>.

Glossing over Hegelian lectures with Kojève-ian acceptance, Fukuyama rediscovers the human condition located in the area of a philosophy of the future and anchored, not only to the horizon of resumption of old forms of ignorance, but also to the incidental loss of wisdom/discursive understanding of the world and the self<sup>23</sup>. In the semantic sphere of *after*, Romanians imagine that they will be happy, observes Fukuyama, by the unbalanced overlapping of happiness and a state of material satisfaction/contentment – (...) “many of the needs and desires that exist in today’s Romania and China will be met. One day they will also have dishwashers and video cameras and personal cars. But will they be pleased with themselves? Or will this prove that man’s satisfaction, as opposed to his happiness, was born not from a purpose in itself, but from the struggle and effort that led to its fulfilment? (...) The life of the last man is a life of physical safety and material abundance”<sup>24</sup>.

Jean-François Revel places Romania at the time of 1989 in the exemplary series of Algeria, Vietnam or Ethiopia, all communist or masked-communist states; and apparently resorts to mimicking the “liberal” formula, the named interval highlighting – not so much as a historical consequence, but rather as a reflex of idealization – the failure of communism, *the end* of a period which, in fact, corresponds to the historical conclusion of an incurable system<sup>25</sup>. Revel’s theorizing mechanism follows the one already applied by Fukuyama – the collapse of the domino, with a reassessment of Romania at the time of 1989 placing it between the “ideological treachery” of asserting human rights (“in December 1989, one of the Vice-Presidencies of the Commission for Human rights from the UN ... belonged to Ceausescu’s Romania! Against human rights, the famous principle of non-interference in internal affairs was raised “<sup>26</sup>) and the up-to-date recognition of the barbarity of Ceausescu’s dictatorship; only in 1989 was “the abject complicity – active or tacit – extended to it by the governments of democratic countries” measured<sup>27</sup>;

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 258.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-François Revel, *quoted work*, pp.19-20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 75.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 77.

the sequential achievements of the Gorbachev project, getting rid of the old tyrants and bringing to power “less monstrous” leaders<sup>28</sup>; the violent manifestations of political travesty, through the regress manifested on June 11-17, 1990, under the eyes of a “vaguely sighing West”, and the restoration of the lost/threatened monopoly of the communists in January<sup>29</sup>; the failure of the 1990 reforms “in countries profoundly altered by Stalinism” – the Soviet Union and Romania – a failure recognized especially in their inability to return to the market economy after the fall of communism<sup>30</sup>.

Read within a common grid (both thinkers opt for referencing the Romanian space *three times* – *contextual and comparative*, by locating a common dynamic with reference to other spaces/states; *individualizing*, by particularizing the political reality of the transition; *evaluative*, by displaying the difficulties of the journey from communism to democracy), the inventories of the Romanian post-1989 area open the possibility of recourse to a double metaphorical register. The first refers to *the Sisyphus model*<sup>31</sup> as it transpires from Fukuyama’s recourse to a phrase with Camus-ian inflections, “Romanians imagine that they will be happy”/“we must imagine Sisyphus being happy”. The second insists on the *image of the “clay children”* as used by Octavio Paz, an author to whom Revel also resorts in his *Rebirth of democracy*, and whose substance intersects Fukuyama’s construct by alternating its founding meaning with the disintegrating sense of a separation from analogy, achieved by either irony or fear; in fact, by the re-valuation of the consciousness of history.

In/from the profile of Sisyphus as *seen/imagined* by Camus, the signs of *the last man* carry the imprint of wisdom and prudence, the “useless worker of Hell” being damned to a “vain and hopeless labour”, “absurd until the end”, anchored to a *space of the break, of the return* – from the slope to the plain and vice versa. The Revelian assertion – “time does not work more than space” – becomes, with Camus, part of a revealing construct: the destiny of Sisyphus is interesting in/through “the clock of consciousness”, as *temporal* recourse placed within a single *space*, perhaps wild and limited, but also marked by happiness and absurdity. In fact, the world of Sisyphus does not bear the signs of *the end* – “everything is not, it has not been exhausted” – but of *change*, of reconfiguration – “the Universe is left without a master” – which makes destiny “one of Man’s problems, which has to be solved among people”.

*Temporality* implies, for Octavio Paz<sup>32</sup>, the assimilation of two fractured coordinates – the perspective of looking at reality and the angle that facilitates an examination of the world and thus passes beyond reality – in a movement of attraction and rejection, common to both revolutionary passion and poetry.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 121.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 195.

<sup>31</sup> Albert Camus, *Fața și reversul. Nunta. Mitul lui Sisif. Omul revoltat. Vara – Front and back. The Wedding. The myth of Sisyphus. The revolted man. Summer*, Bucharest, Rao, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Octavio Paz, *Copiii mlaștinii. Poezia modernă de la romantism la avangardă [Children of the swamp. Modern Poetry from Romanticism to Avantgarde]*, new edition, revised and completed, Cluj-Napoca, Publishing House of Science Book, 2017.

Within time seen as a linear and irreversible progression, the death of God (and *the end of History*, we note) involves a dual *spatializing* position, with an appeal to the *ironically* intellectual paradox and the poetic paradox of the *image*, both coordinates belonging to the area of the *after*: “both revolution and poems are trying to destroy the present, this time of history which is one of inequality, and to bring about the other time”.

That is, to mark the end *of a history* and decree the re-establishment *of another history!* Moreover, the waiting horizon of *after* is prefigured by a hint of salvation from the “collapse of the abyss of space”, through an *ending* opened by the continued perspective of *the last man*, close to the poetic image created by Nerval; of a god (in)blowing the spirit of life into his *clay children*. We must imagine the latter as being happy too!

#### GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fukuyama, Francis, “The End of History?”, in *National Interest*, 16, summer 1989, pp. 3-18;  
Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man*, The Free Press, New York, 1992;  
Fukuyama, Francis, *Sfârșitul istoriei și ultimul om* [*The End of History and the Last Man*], translated by Mihaela Eftimiu, Paideia, Bucharest, 1994;  
Revel, Jean-François, *Revirimentul democrației* [*The reviriment of democracy*], translated by Dan C. Mihăilescu, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1995.